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## THE SO-CALLED HEDONIST PARADOX.

THE hedonist paradox is variously stated, but as most popular and most usually accepted it takes the form, "He that seeks pleasure shall lose it." Despite the fact that men consciously seek pleasure and get it, strong arguments are set forth denying the search for pleasure as an actuality, and attempting either to show that pleasure is an illusion, or that in the supposed hunt for it, man is really seeking something else. By means either of popular argument or of the more highly refined logical presentations, pleasure is shown to be a delusion and a snare; and the search for it impossible. I do not wish to be so bold as to attempt any development of a hedonistic system of ethics. My intention is much more humble. Whether or not pleasure is *the* end of life I shall therefore not attempt here to show. But I think it possible to show that pleasure can be *an* end; that it can be something consciously sought; and that as a reality, it can be an end or aim, as can other things in this universe. I have the greatest respect for the old English Utilitarian school, and consider them not so paradoxical in this particular as is usually supposed.

The two or three lines of argument most successful against the hedonist view of pleasure as an end or aim are the more popular physiological "proofs" and the more abstract logical and psychological views. The former, while most easily refuted, is most dangerous because of its mixture of standpoints, and its semi-religious appeal. While the latter is much more subtle and demands a much closer analysis.

Throughout this paper my contention is that pleasure can be *an* end in life and can be consciously pursued. Whether or not it is *the* end, and whether or not such a hedonist policy is pernicious are therefore not here in question. It is the two last named questions which the popular physiological argument confuses in its supposed refutation of hedonism. In addition it seems to be backed by examples from daily experience which force themselves upon us. Is it not a fact that the most energetic hunters after pleasure are also the most *blasé*? That those who live for pleasure are usually physical wrecks? We

note the pale, drawn face of the dyspeptic or the debilitated condition of the *roué* and perhaps accept as given that he who seeks pleasure must lose it. Or again, we see the virtuous man in all his glory, the happy father of a family, the energetic follower of the strenuous life, and here find happiness existent, but as a side issue; not as an end or aim *per se*. Is this not proof conclusive that pleasure consciously sought is pleasure unobtained; that the most happy man is he who takes his pleasure as something thrown in for good measure as it were; and must not therefore he who seeks pleasure lose it?

Popular arguments of this kind run into a tangle since they confuse pleasure as *the* end with pleasure *an* end, and also introduce the results of pleasure as proofs against pleasure. My present purpose is to deal only with the possibility of pleasure as an end sought. Now the argument which tries to show that the perpetual pleasure seeker does not lead a happy life possesses its force because it mixes the standpoint which considers pleasure as the end and which emphasizes the evil results flowing therefrom, with that which looks upon pleasure as a possible end. It is evident that he who indulges in sensual pleasures may wreck his constitution because of the overstimulation, fatigue or what not which must result. These however are results of pleasure *already obtained*. The fact that a man has a headache in the morning is no argument against the fact that he had a rousing time the night before, or that he purposely sought such pleasing time. The pleasure was aimed at and reached. It may be ultimately a bad thing to indulge in such pleasure, and continual search therefore may and does finally lead to ruin. But the fact remains and is incontestable that the person concerned aims for such pleasure; reaches his end; realizes it and may or may not repent. In fact it is only by having such pleasures repeatedly that the individual concerned becomes *blasé* and worn out. He has sought his special type of pleasure and has found it. Because the consequences of such pleasure are physical and mental wretchedness, we cannot therefore affirm that pleasure has been sought and missed. It is only because it has been gained that the wreckage results. He that seeks pleasure may lose it as an ultimate end, if it be of the crass

and sensual kind, because physiological limitations forbid.

If this last statement be granted, the whole case of hedonism need not be given up, as ultimately concerned. While it may be granted that pleasure is possible in installments, still as an everlasting possession it seems impossible. Everlasting bliss, "linked sweetness" are, on this earth hindered by the limitations of the flesh, which would break down in the strenuous efforts to reach pleasure; or such bliss is at least impossible, because of the limitations of the sense organs, which require rest, food and change. This carries the matter over into the question of pleasure as an ultimate end, and I shall touch upon this only in a suggestive manner. We do not mean by pleasure as an end, some sort of a continual performance. What is meant by pleasure as an ultimate end in this life is something which is to be obtained and felt, enjoyed; something which it is worth while working for; something which is pursued and believed in as an attainable object; and something which, as an end, is supreme over others, to which other ends must be subordinated, or for which they must be removed. What comes after the attainment of the end has nothing to do with the end in its first intention. For example, when we speak of a bit of food as the aim of a dog's chase, we mean simply that some goal is to be reached; not that there is to be an eternally existing goal, an everlasting performance, a perpetual state of bliss.

As so conceived hedonism as thus concerned is neither weaker nor stronger than intuitionism. The most rigid intuitionism is open to similar objections, as those above stated. Duty, as existent in action, virtue in its height, cannot be continuous in a single individual. A man cannot be doing his duty always and unintermittently. Even Kant has acknowledged this. And if an individual pursues his duty without regard to his physical limitations he will fail in his ultimate purpose, if such be considered continuous, just as will the most earthly hedonist. And if in so doing he is really not following his aim, this can also be said of the hedonist. But similarly, as an intermittent possession, virtuous action is possible and may be sought, and so too, pleasure. As everlasting in intention, virtue is no more so than is pleasure. If we consider that the aim of

the hedonist is to keep the tenement of clay erect so that such moments be possible, pleasure as an end or aim is just as much a fact as is duty, and arguments derived from physiological grounds are as valid against the one as against the other. If sleep, recuperation, change, etc., are necessary in the one case, so too are they in the other. And similarly, if considered subordinate to the great aim of duty, why the same thing may be said of the one great aim of pleasure.

The logical argument against the conception of pleasure as an end is much more subtle and demands a somewhat close examination if its validity is to be denied. That we may strive for a thing, it must be before us during the period of effort if it is to be an end; it must be an end *in view*. As such, it must exist as an idea, and to seek pleasure, therefore, we must transform it; it must exist in idea. It is not present; it must be kept in view as an end and so must undergo ideal transformation. But so soon as this is done, we have no longer the pleasure. The pleasure sought has become an idea, such idea being an idea of a pleasure giving object, of a pleasurable state of the self with serial connection with the present moment. But an idea is no longer a pleasure; we have passed from feeling to intellect, and the pleasure has, logically, apparently vanished. Even if the idea itself be pleasurable, this pleasure is not the pleasure in its first intention as sought. Moreover as actually existing, such reflected pleasure cannot be an aim since it is already present. So it seems that he who seeks pleasure shall lose it logically, if not physiologically.

The fallacy here involved resides in the false conception of the function of logical construction. Such construction does not create reality; it simply arranges it, reconstructs it, helps us to adapt it to our needs. Moreover, it fixes such interpretation by means of negotiable symbols, which make more or less rigid the concepts involved. An ideal construction is simply a serial arrangement of signs or marks which enable the individual to react properly to a given situation, or which enable him, by a series of reactions to reach a certain situation. The ideas, etc., are simply sign-boards pointing to the reality, and guiding

proper adjustment, but they are not the reality. They are believed in as leading to some reality sought. Now one who aims at pleasure, *aims at pleasure or some pleasurable condition of the self*, and not at the idea of such state. If we considered the person concerned as aiming at some idea, we must needs have a continual progress, without any hope of ultimate realization. For the idea of the sought-for state is present. To become an aim it must exist in idea which latter however is also present and cannot be an end unless it too, is present in idea; and so on *ad infinitum*. The idea cannot become an aim for it is always with us in this connection. We have it, and as far as the *idea* is concerned, we need go no farther. This idea, however, must be considered only as a sign-board, as a concept leading to a pleasure-producing action. A man who seeks pleasure, usually knows what he wants, and he does not want a mere phantom. He endows his pleasure with a reality just as he does his hat, book, or what not which may be absent, and which he seeks. The ideas of end, means, etc., serially arranged, are simply guides which he follows because he believes their realization will bring him to his goal. *As such* they cannot constitute his aim.

It might be said that the seeker after pleasure aims at the realization of his ideas. This seems to me to be a misinterpretation of the logical construction of the impulses and reactions which have already taken place when the pleasure has been obtained. One who searches for pleasure *wants this pleasure*. He does not stop at the object producing such pleasure, at the realization of his idea, or at anything other than the pleasure. He may be forced to go through certain kinds of adjustment, but these are all (in the supposed search for pleasure) subordinate to the pleasure concerned. The series of ideas leading to such pleasure may be due to a logical construction of some given situation, in which pleasure has been felt, in which a certain state has been experienced. But such logical construction is not the reality, and as such, as purely formal, and lacking in reality (other than logical) cannot serve as an aim and is simply a directive agency. Each step up to the pleasure as existent is simply a means and not the final end.

A striking illustration of opposition between aim and the present, with no logical construction acting as a guide to enable the bridging of the chasm, is seen in the baby who cries unceasingly, "I want my mama." The baby does not want the idea of his mother, nor his mother in any form other than "mama" present, real and tangible: The absence of the parent giving rise to a feeling of want, of dissatisfaction, produces a blind effort towards the mother, which comes "bang up" against failure, because of a lack of logical construction. But whether there be such construction present or not, we have as the end some object, some reality, believed in as existing.

A final consideration must be given to objections possible from the psychological side. Psychologically it might be objected that pleasure as such, has no reality apart from a self or agent, just as an object has no reality without the knower. This is confusing pleasure as a thing-in-itself, with pleasure as felt. Of course such pleasure or object has no existence as a felt pleasure or a known object apart from the self concerned, and it is only in this connection that they have any meaning at all. What pleasure is as a *ding-an-sich* does not worry me in the least when I seek it. I feel its absence, and strive to make it felt. It is considered and believed in to use Baldwin's phrase in connection with objects, as a thing which we can "leave behind and find again." As immediately experienced only, do objects mean anything to us, and as immediate experiences are they sought. That an object has some reality, whether as object, idea, consciousness or what not cannot be denied; it is sought as a believed-in reality. If it had no reality it could not be sought and found. To hold however, that pleasure has a reality, seems to involve us in difficulties.

I shall end my paper with an attempt to show the reality of pleasure. Pleasure as loosely used, may mean either the body in a certain state, or the abstraction used in psychology to designate the qualitative abstraction from the given situation, from the organic condition of the body. Just as consciousness in general means, when fully considered, consciousness of some object, and by abstraction is referred to a self, and the object to some external reality, so too, pleasure means in its full intent,

some pleasurable condition of the body, and by abstraction is referred to a self, and the body to the world of space. It might be said that in trying to find a hat, for example, what we are really seeking is a touch, etc., of the hat. Popular usage, however, has fixed upon "hat" as the proper expression in such a case. Similarly the term "pleasure" has been made rigid in the like connection, and men do not say they are aiming at a bodily condition but at a pleasure. In the one case the emphasis is placed on the object as quantitative, in the other on the object as qualitative. But a reality is believed in, in both cases, whether such belief is scientifically expressed or not.

I again wish to emphasize that in the above discussion I have tried to show that there is no paradox in the search for pleasure. If we consider the matter consistently I think we must acknowledge, that, whatever be the physical and moral results, the search for pleasure is a fact. Indeed it is a question whether or not most of us are not, in a limited degree modern epicureans. Daily we seek pleasure, and daily, (I hope) most of us find it.

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